

How Do You Solve a Problem Like Maria?



We often experience difficulties with situations and people who view a circumstance differently from ourselves. Life would be pretty boring if we all thought and acted the same. This program is centered on Maria Von Trapp, whose life was featured in the musical "The Sound of Music." Maria, the young, energetic novitiate in an Austrian Catholic convent, was curious, contrary and full of energy. She just didn't seem to fit in with the rest of the nuns. She was a problem. Why are some people considered to be a problem? How can we change problems into possibilities? Sometimes we think that some people are a problem because they perceive a situation differently from the way we do.

Program Ideas

Inkblot Test

Psychology textbooks contain examples of pictures that can be viewed as two different things. Psychologists use the inkblot to determine psychological perspectives in individuals. Have the women make an inkblot test. Put paint on one side of a piece of paper, fold the paper in half, rub the sides together and separate. Ask the women to share what they see in the pictures.

Negotiating

As with the inkblot, we all look at the same situation, person or object and see something different. We run into trouble when we are unable to acknowledge the view of the other person. There are a series of steps that can help to solve a problem that we are experiencing with another individual.

- ★ Identify the problem.
- ★ Identify your own unmet needs.
- ★ Set a time to talk together.
- ★ Describe your specific problem and needs to your partner.
- ★ Listen while your partner restates your problem and needs.
- ★ Ask what your partner sees as the problem and what she needs.
- ★ Restate what your partner sees as the problem and what she needs.
- ★ Negotiate a solution by agreeing on the problem, defining some possible solutions, deciding on the best solution and then meeting at a later time to evaluate the decision.

Separate the women into groups of three. Two of the members will prac-

tice negotiating one of the problems listed below. The third person will be the guide, reminding the partners of the next step in the process.

- ❖ A neighbor's barking dog is keeping you awake at night.
- ❖ A friend hasn't repaid the twenty dollars she borrowed.
- ❖ An out of town friend phones at the last minute to cancel the week end you'd planned to spend together.

Communication

To practice communication skills, separate the women into pairs. Have them sit back to back. Make a puzzle by placing two 3 x 5 cards together and cutting them into large block like shapes. Give one woman the completed puzzle that has been attached to a colored piece of paper. The other receives an envelope containing the separated pieces of the same puzzle.

The first woman must describe the puzzle pieces so that her partner will be able to put the puzzle together by listening to her directions.

Maria Von Trapp was perceived by the nuns in her convent as a problem. But in actuality, it was only a difference in how they looked at living out their vocation. Maria desired to take action, whereas the other nuns were focused on the inner life. Their problem was solved when they began to understand that they each had a meaningful vocation, even though they expressed it in different ways.

Define your problem, understand what you need and then act together in finding ways to solve your differences.

Joseph's Dilemma

Joseph had a problem. Mary, the woman he was engaged to marry, was pregnant. If he reprimanded her publicly, she would be stoned to death for breaking the Hebrew law. Because he loved Mary, he considered his only option to be that of divorcing her and ending the relationship quietly. It seemed to Joseph that he was in a no win situation. Either way he would lose the companionship of Mary.

In the first chapter of the book of Matthew we find the story of the birth of Jesus Christ and Joseph's predicament. The first Chapter of Luke gives Mary's perspective. Joseph's plan was to quietly put the problem aside, whereas Mary, though troubled by the situation, praised God for choosing her to give birth to the Savior of the world. The same problem, but a different perspective.

I suppose we could say that Mary and Joseph confronted the situation like most typical men and women. Joseph was concerned about the specifics of the problem and ready to take immediate action, whereas Mary responded like many women, with her emotions. By listening to God and considering the perspective of the other, they confronted their problem and trusted God.

While vacationing in Washington State during the summer, I had the opportunity to view the moon without the distraction of city lights. I discovered that when it was only a quarter moon, I could see the small slice of the moon very clearly, but if I allowed myself to relax and look at the broader picture of the sky surrounding the moon, I could see the shadow of the full moon. I saw what was clear to the naked eye, but I also viewed the possibility of the whole. Two perspectives of the same object, changed by a matter of allowing myself to see more than the obvious.

Is there a circumstance in your life that seems like a problem? Is there someone in your life who causes you frustration? Step back and get a clear view of the situation and of yourself. Your problem may simply be a difference of perspective. Try God's perspective and watch your problem diminish as you trust Him.